

3 Rivers Assessment Working Paper: Moving Towards a 3 Rivers Management Plan April 2009

Purpose

The purpose of the 3 Rivers assessment and management plan is to ensure that Twentymile River, Placer River, and Portage Creek continue to provide a variety of quality recreational experiences for the public, while protecting the natural resources of the area.

Background

Twentymile River, Placer River, and Portage Creek have been popular destinations for water-based recreation including fishing, sightseeing, and hunting. Commercial use has increased on the Twentymile and Placer Rivers over the past decade, while commercial use on Portage has decreased. Creel survey and camera data gathered over the past three seasons showed that recreation use was heaviest from July 20 – September 1 (Labor Day) on Twentymile, especially during the weekends, often reaching or surpassing the river's capacity as defined by its Recreation Opportunity Spectrum (ROS) class.

Current situation

Demand for commercial use on Twentymile, Placer River and Spencer Lake continues to increase. In 2008, the Glacier Ranger District (GRD) decided not to authorize more commercial use on Twentymile and Placer/Spencer before getting public input. More non-commercial use is also expected on both Twentymile and Placer/Spencer. Demand for commercial use of Portage Creek is minimally increasing. Non-commercial use on Twentymile continues to be high, particularly during the silver salmon run. The Forest Service has not collected quantitative information on non-commercial use on Placer River and Portage Creek.

The Way Forward (2009-2010)

To allow the Forest Service to make more thorough decisions regarding use on the 3 Rivers starting in 2010, a river management plan will be developed during 2009 and early 2010. During the planning process, the Forest Service will evaluate existing commercial and non-commercial recreational use, as well as demand for future commercial and non-commercial recreation opportunities, and affected resources and values. Based on this information, the plan may include decisions and/or recommendations on the type, amount, and location of commercial recreational, a safety plan for each of the three rivers, and a monitoring plan that guided by the principles of adaptive management, as well as other implementation measures.

Before the river management plan can be developed, a capacity for recreational use will be determined for Placer River, Spencer Lake, and possibly Portage Creek. GRD staff will also meet with commercial guides to discuss study findings and the development of management recommendations. Commercial and non-commercial users' input will be used to help develop alternatives. A proposed action will be developed, followed by environmental analysis. Public participation plan help to shape the plan throughout this process.

Monitoring will continue on the 3 Rivers in 2009. GRD plans to place cameras on each of the rivers, collect observational data, and continue the Chinook spawning survey. Also, throughout the planning process, the Forest Service will continue to engage state agencies (Alaska Department of Natural Resources (DNR) and Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADFG)) on issues regarding safety and resource degradation.

Approximate Timeline

March – June 2009	Meet with commercial guides, public scoping, develop proposed action
May 27, 2009	Public participation session – Girdwood Community Center
June – September 2009	Continue monitoring on the 3 Rivers
June – December 2009	Conduct environmental analysis
February - March 2010	Issue final NEPA document and decision
March 2010	Implement plan (may include prospectus)
Ongoing	Continue communication with DNR and ADFG